EVIL TO HIM WHO EVIL THINKS

By RICHARD HARDING DAVIS

As a rule the instant the season closed Aline Proctor sailed on the first steamer for London, where awaited her many friends, both English and American—and to Paris, where she selected those gowns that on and off the stage helped to make her famous. But this particular summer she had spent with the Endicotts at Bar Harbor, and it was at their house Herbert Nelson met her. After Herbert met her very few other men enjoyed that privilege. This was her wish as well as his.

They behaved disgracefully. Every morning after breakfast they disappeared and spent the day at opposite ends of a canoe. She, knowing nothing of a canoe, was happy in stabbing the waters with her paddle while he told her how he loved her and at the same time, with anxious eyes on his own paddle, skilfully frustrated her efforts to drown them both. While the affair lasted it was ideal and beautiful, but unfortunately it lasted only two months.

Then Lord Albany, temporarily in America as honorary attache to the British Embassy; his adoring glances, his accent and the way he brushed his hair proved too much for the susceptible heart of Aline and she chucked Herbert and asked herself how a woman of her age could have seriously considered marrying a youth just out of Harvard! At that time she was a woman of nineteen; but as she had been before the public ever since she was eleven the women declared she was not a day under twenty-six; and the men knew she could not possibly be over sixteen.

Aline's own idea of herself was that without some one in love with her she could not exist—that unless she knew some man cared for her and for her alone she would wither and die. As a matter of fact whether any one loved her or not did not in the least interest her. There were several dozen men who could testify to that. They knew. What she really wanted was to be head over ears in love—to adore some one, to worship him, to imagine herself starving for him and making sacrifice hits for him; but when the moment came to make the sacrifice hit and marry the man she invariably found that a greater, truer love had arisen—for some one else.

This greater and truer love always made her behave abominably to the youth she had just jilted. She wasted no time on post-mortems. She was so eager to show her absolute loyalty to the new monarch that she grudged every thought she ever had given the one she had cast into exile. She resented him bitterly. She could not forgive him for having allowed her to be desperately in love with him. He should have known he was not worthy of such a love as hers. He should have known that the real prince was waiting only just round the corner.

As a rule, the rejected ones behaved well. Each decided Aline was much too wonderful a creature for him, and continued to love her cautiously and from a distance. None of them ever spoke or thought ill of her and would gladly have punched any one who did. It was only the women whose young men Aline had temporarily confiscated, and then returned saddened and chastened, who were spiteful. And they dared say no more than that Aline would probably have known her mind better if she had had a mother to look after her.

This, coming to the ears of Aline, caused her to reply that a girl who could not keep straight herself, but needed a mother to help her, would not keep straight had she a dozen mothers. As she put it cheerfully, a girl who goes wrong and then pleads "no mother to guide her" is like a jockey who pulls a race and then blames the horse.

Each of the young men Aline rejected married some one else and, except when the name of Aline Proctor in the theatrical advertisements or in electric lights on Broadway gave him a start, forgot that for a month her name and his own had been linked together from Portland to San Francisco. But the girl he married did not forget.

She never understood what the public saw in Aline Proctor. That Aline was the queen of musical comedy she attributed to the fact that Aline knew the right people and got herself written about in the right way. But that she could sing, dance, act; that she possessed compelling charm; that she "got across" not only to the tired business man, the wine agent, the college boy, but also to the children and the old ladies, was to her never apparent.

Just as Aline could not forgive the rejected suitor for allowing her to love him, so the girl he married never forgave Aline for having loved her husband. Least of all could Sally Winthrop, who two years after the summer at Bar Harbor married Herbert Nelson, forgive her. And she let Herbert know it.

Herbert was properly in love with Sally Winthrop, but he liked to think that his engagement to Aline, though brief and abruptly terminated, had proved him to be a man fatally attractive to all women. And though he was hypnotizing himself into believing that his feeling for Aline had been the grand passion, the truth was that all that kept her in his thoughts was his own vanity.

He was not discontented with his lot—his lot being Sally Winthrop, her millions and her estate of 300 acres near Westbury. Nor was he still longing for Aline. It was only that his vanity was flattered by the recollection that one of the young women most beloved by the public had once loved him.

"I once was a king in Babylon," he used to misquote to himself, "and she was a Christian slave."

He was as young as that.

Had he been content in secret to assure himself that he once had been a reigning monarch, his vanity would have harmed no one; but unfortunately, he possessed certain documentary evidence of that fact. And he was sufficiently foolish not to wish to destroy it. The evidence consisted of a dozen photographs he had snapped of Aline during the happy days at Bar Harbor and on which she had written phrases somewhat exuberant and sentimental.

From these photographs Nelson was loath to part—especially with one that showed Aline seated on a rock that ran into the waters of the harbor and on which she had written: "As long as this rock lasts!" Each time she was in love Aline believed it would last. That in the past it never had lasted did not discourage her.

What to do with these photographs that so vividly recalled the most tumultuous period of his life Nelson could not decide. If he hid them away and Sally found them he knew she would make his life miserable. If he died and Sally then found them, when he no longer was able to explain that they meant nothing to him, she would believe he always had loved the other woman and it would make her miserable. He felt he could not safely keep them in his own house; his vanity did not permit him to burn them, and accordingly he decided to unload them on some one else.

The young man to whom he confided his collection was Charles Cochran. Cochran was a charming person from the West. He had studied in the Beaux Arts and on foot had travelled over England and Europe, preparing himself to try his fortune in New York as an architect. He was now in the office of the architects Post & Constant, and lived alone in a tiny farmhouse he had made over for himself near Herbert Nelson at Westbury, Long Island.

Post & Constant were a fashionable firm and were responsible for many of the French chateaus and English country houses that were rising near Westbury, Hempstead and Roslyn; and it was Cochran's duty to drive over that territory in his runabout, keep an eye on the contractors and dissuade clients from grafting mansard roofs on Italian villas. He had built the summer home of the Herbert Nelsons, and Herbert and Charles were very warm friends.

Charles was of the same lack of years as was Herbert, of an enthusiastic and sentimental nature; and, like many other young men, the story of his life also was the lovely and much desired Aline Proctor. It was this coincidence that had made them friends and that had led Herbert to select Charles as the custodian of his treasure. As a custodian and confidant Charles especially appealed to his new friend because, except upon the stage and in restaurants, Charles had never seen Aline Proctor, did not know her—and considered her so far above him, so unattainable, that he had no wish to seek her out. Unknown, he preferred to worship at a distance. In this determination Herbert strongly encouraged him.

When he turned over the pictures to Charles, Herbert could not resist showing them to him. They were in many ways charming. They presented the queen of musical comedy in several new roles. In one she was in a sailor suit, giving an imitation of a girl paddling a canoe. In another she was in a riding habit mounted upon a pony of which she seemed very much afraid. In some she sat like a siren among the rocks with the waves and seaweed snatching at her feet, and in another she crouched beneath the wheel of Herbert's touring car. All of the photographs were unprofessional and intimate, and the legends scrawled across them were even more intimate.

"'As long as this rock lasts!'" read Herbert. At arm's length he held the picture for Cochran to see, and laughed bitterly and unmirthfully, as he had heard leading men laugh in problem plays.

"That is what she wrote," he mocked—"but how long did that last? Until she saw that little red headed Albany playing polo. That lasted until his mother heard of it. She thought her precious lamb was in the clutches of a designing actress and made the Foreign Office cable him home.

"Then Aline took up one of those army aviators, and chucked him for that fellow who painted her portrait, and threw him over for the lawn tennis champion. Now she's engaged to Chester Griswold, and heaven pity her!

"Of course he's the greatest catch in America; but he's a prig and a snob, and he's so generous with his money that he'll give you five pennies for a nickel any time you ask him. He's got a heart like the meter of a taxicab, and he's as jealous as a cat. Aline will have a fine time with Chester! I knew him at St. Paul's and at Harvard, and he's got as much red blood in him as an eel!"

Cochran sprang to the defence of the lady of his dreams.

"There must be some good in the man," he protested, "or Miss Proctor ——"

"Oh, those solemn snobs," declared Herbert, "impress women by just keeping still. Griswold pretends the reason he doesn't speak to you is because he's too superior, but the real reason is that he knows whenever he opens his mouth he shows he is an ass."

Reluctantly Herbert turned over to Charles the precious pictures.

"It would be a sin to destroy them, wouldn't it?" he prompted.

Cochran agreed heartily.

"You might even," suggested Herbert, "leave one or two of them about. You have so many of Aline already that one more wouldn't be noticed. Then when I drop in I could see it." He smiled ingratiatingly.

"But those I have I bought," Cochran pointed out. "Anybody can buy them, but yours are personal. And they're signed."

"No one will notice that but me," protested Herbert. "Just one or two," he coaxed—"stuck round among the others. They'd give me a heap of melancholy pleasure."

Charles shook his head doubtfully.

"Your wife often comes here with you," he said. "I don't believe they'd give her melancholy pleasure. The question is, are you married to Sally or Aline Proctor?"

"Oh, of course," exclaimed Herbert, "if you refuse!"

With suspicious haste Charles surrendered.

"I don't refuse," he explained; "I only ask if it's wise. Sally knows you were once very fond of Miss Proctor—knows you were engaged to her."

"But," protested Herbert, "Sally sees your photographs of Aline. What difference can a few more make? After she's seen a dozen she gets used to them."

No sooner had Herbert left him than the custodian of the treasure himself selected the photographs he would display. In them the young woman he had, from the front row of the orchestra, so ardently admired appeared in a new light. To Cochran they seemed at once to render her more kindly, more approachable; to show her as she really was, the sort of girl any youth would find it extremely difficult not to love. Cochran found it extremely easy.

The photographs gave his imagination all the room it wanted. He believed they also gave him an insight into her real character that was denied to anybody else. He had always credited her with all the virtues; he now endowed her with every charm of mind and body.

In a week to the two photographs he had selected from the loan collection for purposes of display and to give Herbert melancholy pleasure he had added three more. In two weeks there were half a dozen. In a month, nobly framed in silver, in leather of red, green and blue, the entire collection smiled upon him from every part of his bedroom. For he now kept them where no one but himself could see them. No longer was he of a mind to share his borrowed treasure with others—not even with the rightful owner.

Chester Griswold, spurred on by Aline Proctor, who wanted to build a summer home on Long Island, was motoring with Post of Post & Constant in the neighborhood of Westbury. Post pointed out several houses designed by his firm, which he hoped might assist Griswold in making up his mind as to the kind of house he wanted; but none they had seen seemed to satisfy his client.

"I won't have you two pretending you don't know each other," he blustered.

"What I want is a cheap house," explained the young millionaire. "I don't really want a house at all," he complained. "It's Miss Proctor's idea. When we are married I intend to move into my mother's town house, but Miss Proctor wants one for herself in the country. I've agreed to that; but it must be small and it must be cheap."

"Cheap" was a word that the clients of Post & Constant never used; but Post knew the weaknesses of some of the truly rich, and he knew also that no house ever built cost only what the architect said it would cost.

"I know the very house you want!" he exclaimed. "One of our young men owns it. He made it over from an old farmhouse. It's very well arranged; we've used his ground plan several times and it works out splendidly. If he's not at home I'll show you over the place myself. And if you like the house he's the man to build you one."

When they reached Cochran's home he was at Garden City playing golf, but the servant knew Mr. Post and to him and his client threw open every room in the house.

"Now, this," exclaimed the architect enthusiastically, "is the master's bedroom. In your case it would probably be your wife's room and you would occupy the one adjoining, which Cochran now uses as a guest room. As you see, they are entirely cut off from——"

Mr. Griswold did not see. Up to that moment he had given every appearance of being both bored and sulky. Now his attention was entirely engaged—but not upon the admirable simplicity of Mr. Cochran's ground plan, as Mr. Post had hoped.

Instead, the eyes of the greatest catch in America were intently regarding a display of photographs that smiled back at him from every corner of the room. Not only did he regard these photographs with a savage glare, but he approached them and carefully studied the inscriptions scrawled across the face of each.

Post himself cast a glance at the nearest photographs and then hastily manœuvred his client into the hall and closed the door.

"We will now," he exclaimed, "visit the butler's kitchen, thus saving——"

But Griswold did not hear him. Without giving another glance at the house he stamped out of it and, plumping himself down in the motor car, banged the door. Not until Post had driven him well into New York did he make any comment.

"What did you say," he then demanded, "is the name of the man who owns that last house we saw?"

Post told him.

"I never heard of him!" said Griswold as though he were delivering young Cochran's death sentence. "Who is he?"

"He's an architect in our office," said Post. "We think a lot of him. He'll leave us soon of course. The best ones always do. His work is very popular. So is he."

"I never heard of him," repeated Griswold. Then, with sudden heat, he added savagely: "But I mean to to-night."

When Griswold had first persuaded Aline Proctor to engage herself to him he had suggested that to avoid embarrassment she should tell him the names of the other men to whom she had been engaged.

"What kind of embarrassment would that avoid?"

"If I am talking to a man," said Griswold, "and he knows the woman I'm going to marry was engaged to him and I don't know that he has me at a disadvantage,"

"I don't see that he has," said Aline. "If we suppose, for the sake of argument, that to marry me is desirable I would say that the man who was going to marry me had the advantage over the one I had declined to marry."

"I want to know who those men are," explained Griswold, "because I want to avoid them. I don't want to talk to them, I don't want even to know them."

"I don't see how I can help you," said Aline. "I haven't the slightest objection to telling you the names of the men

Continued on Eighth Page.

A FEW OF THIS SEASON'S DEBUTANTES WHOSE BEAUTY CHARMS SOCIETY

MISS MILDRED SAWYER
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